

DIME NOVEL ROUND-UP

A monthly magazine devoted to the collecting, preservation and literature of the old-time dime and nickel novels, libraries and popular story papers.

Vol. 28 No. 5

May 15, 1960

Whole No. 332

Don on the Farm

by Charlie Duprez



Don at his famous sign of the Three Black Crows

Am glad they named him Don, gave me an idea for a title, the oldtime song many of you may recall, Down on the Farm. Don Learnard, one of our old time brothers is strictly not a farmer, nor is his very palatial home a farm, yet he affectionately calls it that.

It was my great pleasure to have met Don sometime ago having been invited by he and his very charming wife Gracie. En route my wife Claire

and myself made a stopover at the home of our most very Reckless Ralph. An overnight stop at Ralphs, if you never had that honor you have sure missed something. It's an event you won't forget. The bedroom we were assigned to was so surrounded by novels, etc., even on the floor so that one had to be mighty careful not to break a leg or something getting to and from — well you know.

In the February Roundup Reckless

gave a short account of his going with us to Don's. It was an unusually hot night and I'm wondering whether Ralph still has them thar durn storm windows up—we survived somehow.

So the following morn, long after the sun wasn't coming up (it was raining) we shoved off and in an hour's time in spite of Ralph's navigation directions arrived right smack in front of Don's Three Black Crows placed for all to admire atop the letter box.

Gracie met us at the door, soon to be followed by Donny boy, and for a real warm greeting they knew all the angles. Made a feller right ta hum b'gosh.

We arrived too late for lunch, but we had plenty of eats before our departure. Of course much pilaver was indulged in and once in a while we let Reckless get a word in, but he had to work fast. After a few interruptions on his part the chin music continued.

Then came one of the highlights, a visit below decks whither Don had himself a swell little den, and what intrigued me especially was the bar, not only the bar but the many bottles in the back containing a liquid that if partaken of would make all the world quite rosy. I think I saw among the various brands one half empty Pepsi Cola bottle. That was in case some sissy came along who couldn't drink hisn or hern straight.

That jest ain't all me lads, on the walls almost life sized the most gorgeous gals, painted no less right on the walls. Painted by one of Don's daughters who must be quite an art-

ist. She saved quite a bit of labor in this work by not covering them with a lot of clothing—if you know what I mean. Real dizzy stuff that had that certain appeal. Mabe she figured the figures wearing modern clothing would soon go out of style, and the body beautiful never did nor ever will. So much for that.

In the rear of Don's so called farm there is a beautiful bit of woodland that due to Don's efforts looks more like a park. A lovely entrance was built of logs. I think Don does a bit of light farming inside raising vegetables.

We spent a few days there having a wonderful time, all but Reckless who remained but one night as he wanted to visit a few dime novel friends up in Boston, going thither by bus. We were sorry to see him go. On one of the days Don took my wife and myself on quite a ride in and around Boston. Little did he know that a few years previous I swore never to ride in that town again having been fed up with the very heavy traffic and no matter in what direction I drove I was always going the wrong way. However as he was driving I did enjoy it—thanks again Don.

Don and his wife are now retired, taking life easy. He was for many years on the railroad as postal clerk. His wife's a pretty smart cookie, head buyer in one of the largest dept. stores for years. He still revels in his beloved novels, especially the Liberty Boys of 76. He is still trying to have the entire set.

At this writing they are both Hon-

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eyemooning down at Roy Morris's Honeymoon Cottages in Orlando but by the time this may go to press will long since be back on the so-called Farm and chasing out to the Three

Black Crows looking what the mailman has brunged. Yes indeed our visit there will long be remembered and if luck holds out for this old buzzard we may drop in again. Thanks again Don—and Gracie.

Wolff—And the Tousey Reprints

by Ralph Adimari and C. Arthur Neetz

In order to fully comprehend the drift of this article, it is necessary to go back to the year 1902. It was in that year (on the 7th of September) that the death of Frank Tousey occurred. His publications were taken over by his brother, Sinclair, though the firm name of Frank Tousey was retained until 1922, on which further data will be presented later in this article.

Some time later, Mrs. Frank Tousey married a man by the name of George Gordon Hastings, and at her death in 1906, willed the control of the firm (she held the majority of stock) to Hastings. Sinclair Tousey, who was part owner, took the case to the courts that same year but lost out. However, he was retained as president of the firm and editor of all the publications, while Hastings filled the office of treasurer. Upon his death in 1910, he willed the control of the firm to his daughter (by a former marriage) Norma. Sinclair Tousey was still retained in his former positions, because of the experience he had attained in his filling the offices of same.

In 1912, Wolff appeared on the stage, probably by purchasing some stock from Norma. (It may have been a gift, according to later events.) At any rate, this event does not appear to be favorable to Tousey, who tries by a court order in 1913, to force Norma and Wolff from interfering with his business. The order was refused, however and though Tousey is retained as president he evidently did not have all his own way about things.

Early in 1915, possibly late in '14, Wolff is married to Norma Hastings

and assumes the presidency and complete control. Tousey is retained as editor, but not for long, as on July 29, 1915, he died—either by accident or suicide—by gas. However that may be, it was his contention that Norma and Wolff were trying to break him so as to take control of the firm. He (Tousey) was heavily in debt and had a note for \$50,000 coming due in 1916 which he owed to the George Hastings estate. All this time, however, the publications had been operating under the name of Frank Tousey, Publisher, and this order was not yet to be changed.

Now that Wolff held control, the policy of the weeklies was changed. All had already started reprinting their former stories with the exception of Wild West Weekly, which was still running original stories (February 1915). This was immediately cut out and the reprints started as the series on the World War running in the library at that time, evidently did not find popular approval among the young readers. The other five weeklies had been reprinting with revised cover illustrations over the old-time ones, so as to appear more modern and up-to-date.

Wolff changed this, however, and immediately started reprinting the old illustrations in an effort to curb expenses for artists, etc., and he also made the cover into a three-color affair instead of the six-color one. It is claimed by some that the circulation improved with the revival of the old illustrations, but this probably did not last long, being only a spasm. At this time the World War was receiving national attention, and was the cause of prices booming sky-

high. This was one of the reasons, probably, why Wolff altered the weeklies, at the same time using a cheaper grade of paper, as the price on all paper increased as much as 125%. (You all know that the price of newspapers was increased at that time from one cent to two cents.) These incidents were the first setback to the Wolff regime.

The next one was not slow in following, as on the third week of January 1917, the price of the weeklies was increased to 6c. Then again, there was the stipulation for a standing order to newsdealers for a copy of the weekly, for if one did not happen to obtain his regular issue of the novels, naturally he more or less drifted away from reading them.

At any rate Wolff drifted along under the Tousey name until July, 1917, when he personally took over three publications, viz., Pluck and Luck, Wild West Weekly and Fame and Fortune, and changed his address to 166 W. 23rd Street. Norma Hastings Wolff (as her name appeared on the masthead) was president of the firm that published the three latter named libraries. Harry Wolff was business manager for all six, while Lu Senarens, an old writer for Frank Tousey, was made editor of the publications, (a position that he retained for several years, later retiring and going into business for himself, writing scenarios. He died in 1927.)

Late in 1918 occurred the third come-down since Wolff had taken charge. The publications took on a still cheaper look, due to the fact that the list of titles of back numbers were no longer published on the back cover, which remained blank, the list of titles being published on the last inside page.

However, the worst was yet to come (and this probably was the cause of the disappearance of the large size edition.) This bad luck came in the form of the great pressmen's strike in New York, which started about the third week in October, 1919, and continued for eight weeks. During this period the weeklies were published in

Buffalo, New York, and what a horrible appearance they had! The covers and reading matter were of one color, faded and washed-out, the size was distorted by larger proportions, and in fact, it was an all-around take-down.

In December, 1919, the weeklies resumed their normal size though the first edition was a "brown and white," which was, however, a great improvement over the others. The following week (the last in 1919, the weeklies assumed their original appearance as before the strike.

But their next downfall was not far distant for with the issues of the next week (first week in January), the size of the illustration was reduced to about 7x10 inches, although the size of the weekly was not altered. Their greatest downfall was not far distant, however, for with the issue of the third week in May, the size of the publications was decreased to the same as that of the illustration, viz., about 7 by 10. Thus ended the regime of the large-sized weekly, and from then on the circulation dropped rapidly. Of course, the modern inventions, the radio, automobile, movies, etc. began at that time to draw away still a larger part of the circulation, but if the larger sized edition had been retained, probably the drop-off would not have been so rapid. May it also be mentioned at this time, that on the last week in January, 1920, the price of the weeklies had been increased to 7 cents, which was another great factor in the drop-off of circulation, as that, together with the decrease in size, was a double blow to faithful readers.

To those of you readers who are interested in knowing the numbers of the libraries when these changes were taking place, the following statistics are given concerning the numbers of the different libraries during these periods of the rapid downfall of the Wolff regime. Therefore, the following lists will prove especially valuable to collectors who would like to have nice copies for their files, and who cannot afford to buy original

numbers unless absolutely necessary to fill in some vacancy not reprinted in decent form.

The numbers of the different libraries the week before the pressmen's strike were as follows: Pluck and Luck, #1115; Liberty Boys of '76, #981; Work and Win, #1089; Secret Service, #1082; Wild West Weekly, #887 and Fame and Fortune, #733.

The numbers when the weeklies resumed their normal size (except for the color of the illustration) were: Pluck and Luck, #1124; Liberty Boys of '76, #990; Work and Win, #1098; Secret Service, #1091; Wild West Weekly, #896 and Fame and Fortune #742.

The last numbers of the large size edition were: Pluck and Luck, #1144; Liberty Boys of '76, #1101; Work and Win, #1119; Secret Service, #1112; Wild West Weekly, #947 and Fame and Fortune, #763.

The weeklies then continued under the name of Harry E. Wolff, Publisher and Frank Tousey, Publisher, until early in the year 1922, when the remaining three publications operating under the Tousey name was taken over by Wolff under the name of Harry E. Wolff, Publisher, Inc. Thus ended the name of Tousey on "dime novels," after a reign of over fifty years (it was in 1880 that his name first appeared on a publication).

The next setback to the novels was another advance in price, which event occurred in the first week of January 1924, when the price was increased to 8 cents. Things went from bad to worse for Wolff, for in May, 1925, three publications were discontinued, viz., Liberty Boys of '76, Secret Service and Work and Win. The numbers when they discontinued publication were: 1274, 1374 and 1382 respectively.

The Wolff regime was now fast nearing its end. The final blow fell on the 2nd of July, 1926, when the

name Wolff no longer appeared on the weeklies that remained. Instead a new firm had bought the rights to them. This first was known as the Westbury Publishing Co. (secretly Street & Smith; the name was a subterfuge), who had been the bitterest rivals of the House of Tousey for half a century. Wolff moved to Canada, but of his history there, nothing is known.

Our story is fast nearing its end, but we must yet conclude the story of the three remaining publications, Wild West Weekly, Pluck and Luck, and Fame and Fortune. Of these three, Wild West Weekly was first to go under, the last issue, No. 1294 appeared in 1927, when it was then formed into a pulpwood magazine of the same name, selling for 10c. Fame and Fortune with the last No. 1197, fell next, in 1928, and it also was put in magazine form, in which it lasted for about two years, going under in 1930. Pluck and Luck hung on a year longer, but with the issue of March 6, 1929, #1605, this famous weekly passed out of existence, after a reign of over thirty years, having been started by Frank Tousey 'way back in 1898. It had fought to the last ditch, but time, the grim reaper, overtook it at last.

The End

Mr. William G. Lee is breaking up his Alger collection. Drop him a self-addressed envelope for his list.

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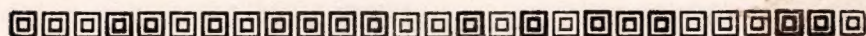
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